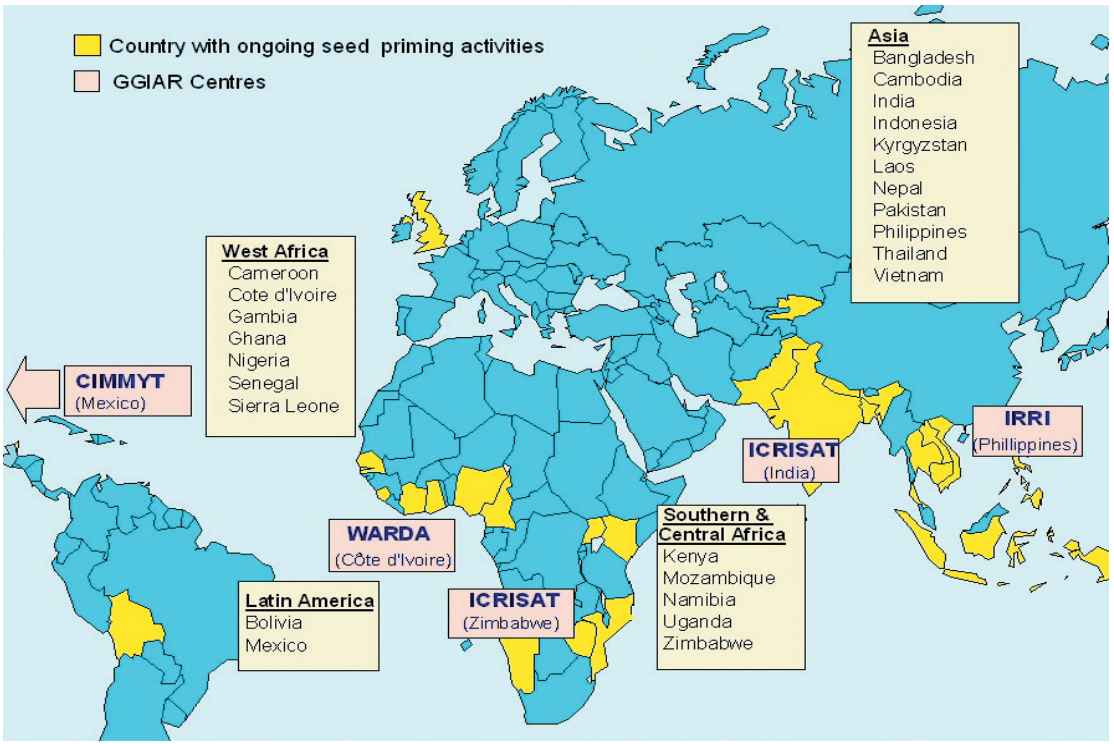

Figure 1. Countries where on-farm seed priming is being investigated or promoted.

Researchers from CAZS Natural Resources, funded by the Plant Sciences Research Programme of the Department for International Development (DFID), have taken a fresh look at this on-farm seed soaking, which is also known as priming. They began their studies in marginal areas of western India, but later expanded the work to include the countries shown in Figure 1. They calculated safe limits – the maximum length of time for which seeds can be soaked and which, if exceeded could lead to seed or seedling damage - for a wide range of tropical and sub-tropical crops. By reducing the recommended soaking time (Table 1) to less than the safe limit, they were able to promote on-farm seed priming as a low-cost, low-risk intervention. The box opposite gives more details about seed priming.

Armed with appropriate safe limits, collaborating farmers, researchers and extension workers implemented simple on-farm trials in which the performance of primed seed was compared with that of non-primed seed. The results were remarkable. Farmers reported that primed crops emerged faster and grew more vigorously. This alone is reason enough to adopt seed priming. In